

**EDITOR'S NOTE: Sen. Cardin writes periodic columns for Maryland publications. The following column about additional funding for energy assistance may be of interest to your readers. Please contact Susan Sullam at [susan\\_sullam@cardin.senate.gov](mailto:susan_sullam@cardin.senate.gov) if you have any questions.**

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***PRECEDENCE: Senator Cardin is a member of five committees: Foreign Relations, Judiciary, Environment and Public Works, Budget, and Small Business and Entrepreneurship. His web site is: [cardin.senate.gov](http://cardin.senate.gov)***

## MARYLANDERS CAN GET HELP WITH THEIR ENERGY BILLS

By U.S. Senator Benjamin L. Cardin

Every winter we hear news reports of tragic fires caused when families who cannot pay their energy bills turn to space heaters or candles to save money. This year it is particularly difficult for many families as our nation copes with a declining economy. As the weather turns colder, I want struggling Maryland families to know that they can get help in paying their energy bills.

In September, the federal government significantly increased funding for the Low-Income Home Energy Assistance Program (LIHEAP). This winter, Maryland will see an increase in energy assistance from \$35 million to \$110 million. In this coming fiscal year, the Maryland Department of Human Resources expects LIHEAP to help an additional 10,000 people from last year.

LIHEAP is a federally funded block grant program that was created in 1982. Its purpose is to assist low-income households, particularly those with the lowest incomes and that pay a high proportion of household income to meet their home energy needs. The program encourages states to give priority to households with the presence of a vulnerable individual such as a young child, disabled person or frail senior.

I consider this increase in funding one of the success stories of the 110<sup>th</sup> Congress. It was one of my top legislative priorities and as we continue to see a decline in the economy it's even more important. The nationwide jobless rate recently rose to 6.7 percent in November and it's important that we provide low-income Marylanders with the assistance they need to stay warm and safe this winter.

The Office of Home Energy Programs (OHEP) helps Maryland citizens pay for their heating bills, minimize heating crises and make energy costs more affordable. OHEP offers various energy assistance programs to help promote energy conservation, customer financial responsibility and energy independence.

A Maryland household of four earning up to \$37,100 is eligible to apply for the program. A single person earning up to \$18,200 also is eligible to apply. Energy assistance is a year-round program and applications are accepted any time of year, but enrollees must reapply each fiscal year.

If you need assistance paying your energy bills, do not wait for a turn off notice. Act now. To apply for assistance, call 1-800-352-1446, or go to [www.dhr.state.md.us/meap](http://www.dhr.state.md.us/meap) or [www.problemsolver.maryland.gov](http://www.problemsolver.maryland.gov).

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